Measuring how fast your sprinkler system applies water

April is the WaterSense Sprinkler Spruce-up month, and now is a good time to figure out your irrigation system's precipitation rate. That is, how long it takes to apply a certain amount of water to your landscape.

You can measure the precipitation rate by using several tuna cans, or really any set of flat-bottomed food cans of identical size and shape. ***You can also pick up a free catch-can kit at the Leander Activity Center through April 30, or until supplies run out***. The activity center is at 11880 Hero Way W., Suite 600. You can also pick up a Find it-Flag it-Fix it checklist for evaluating your sprinkler system.

To do the measurement, arrange the cans or catch-can around an irrigation zone and run the zone for 10 minutes. Using a ruler, measure the water depth after 10 minutes and average the depth between the cans. Then, multiply by six to get the precipitation rate in inches per hour.

Generally, you want to aim for an inch per week of combined rain and sprinkler water, reducing sprinkler run times accordingly when rainfall occurs. For example, if the precipitation rate is two inches per hour, then you know to set that zone for no more than 30 minutes.

You should repeat this test on each zone. Different head types will produce different precipitation rates. Spray heads apply water at about twice the rate of rotor heads, for instance.

Remember, if rainfall occurs, reduce run times to allow for natural precipitation, or even better, do not run it at all.

For more information about efficient irrigation and water conservation, go to the EPA WaterSense website at www.epa.gov/watersense.